



Neighborhood Enhancement Grant Program

BLACKSBURG'S NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT MATCHING GRANT FUND

Believing that people build stronger communities by working together, your Town has initiated a Matching Grant Fund as part of Town Council's initiative enacting the Neighborhood Enhancement Program. The Town has budgeted to support matching neighborhood grants awarded to individual neighborhood groups. The Town match to a single neighborhood grant project can range from \$100 to \$2,000. Neighborhood representatives can submit an application to the Neighborhood Enhancement Program Coordinator or Neighborhood Planner for their project.

Who is eligible?

Any neighborhood group that comes together to work on a mutually agreed upon project that benefits the whole neighborhood is eligible. The group must be inclusive of all the residents within the vicinity, both in decision making and implementing the project. An eligible neighborhood group is defined as having met the following criteria:

- Have established boundaries, which include one or more neighborhoods within the Town and no fewer than 50 households. (Exceptions can be made for geographically isolated neighborhoods).
- Be open for membership to all residents, property owners and businesses within the neighborhood boundaries. (Membership fees can not bar a resident from participating in an organization)
- Hold meetings open to the entire membership, and hold a minimum of two meetings per year.
- Notify all residents within the neighborhood boundaries of meetings.

What kinds of projects are eligible?

Any mutually agreed upon capital project that is located on public property, common area, a public easement or private land where the neighborhood as a whole benefits is eligible. If continual maintenance is needed, a group must show before the grant is awarded, how they plan to fund the maintenance. This grant is not designed to address maintenance needs. The project must be non-profit in nature and must be developed and completed in compliance with Town guidelines. Projects are encouraged to be located on public property, however it may be appropriate for grant projects to occur on private property or common area. In cases where the project will not occur on public property the project must have a clear public benefit and an agreement indicating how the funds will be expended must be signed before funds can be allocated. Some project ideas include:

- Landscaping, flowerbeds, tree planting.
- Playground equipment, special recreation equipment, benches, and/or lights.
- Improvements to neighborhood entryways, such as signage.
- Use in conjunction with Town Cost Share Programs to construct sidewalks, curb / gutter, drainage improvements, traffic control measures, etc...

A good way to generate ideas is to walk with your neighborhood group through your area and let your imagination go! Projects must be completed within one (1) year of the grant being awarded.

How does the neighborhood match work?

The Town will match any neighborhood cash contribution, up to \$2,000. For example, if the neighborhood can raise \$500, the Town will match that amount by awarding \$500. The maximum amount of the Town contribution is \$2000 per project. Neighborhoods are encouraged to involve local businesses as partners in their contributions. Other fundraising ideas are available through the Neighborhood Planning Office (961-1126).

Neighbor labor

Contributions can include up to 25% in neighbor labor. Neighbor labor is actual labor time spent implementing (not planning) the project, valued by the Town at the rate of \$10 per hour. For example, a \$1,000 project takes a \$500 match from the neighborhood and a \$500 match from the Town. To meet the neighborhood's \$500 match, the neighbors could work up to 12.5 hours on the project (i.e. building playground equipment, digging holes for landscaping, etc.) to raise \$125 toward their neighborhood contribution (25%). The Town will then proceed to pay an additional \$125 over its normal 50-50 match. In this scenario the neighborhood would pay \$375 out of pocket and the Town would contribute \$625 towards the project. The neighborhood may raise as much money as they want for their project however the maximum Town contribution cannot exceed \$2,000 including neighbor labor. The use of neighbor labor must be documented in the grant application. If a neighborhood wishes to utilize neighbor labor contact the neighborhood planner at 961-1126 to assist in developing the application.

Can this Grant work in Conjunction with Town Cost Share Programs?

The Town offers a variety of cost share programs to residents to address many issues ranging from sidewalk, stormwater, to drainage issues around Town. These programs are under the direction of the Town Engineer. This Grant Program can be used in conjunction with these cost share programs. Neighborhoods seeking to utilize the grant and a cost share program together need to consult and work with both the Neighborhood Planner and Town Engineer to ensure the projects are compatible and that the applications are appropriately filled out.

How do we apply?

- 1) First, contact the neighborhood planner at 961-1126 to assist in the application development.
- 2) Get the neighbors together and envision a project that benefits the neighborhood. Make sure that all neighborhood residents are given the opportunity to be part of the decision making and implementing.
- 3) Be sure to use the criteria for evaluation, listed in the next section, to develop your project. The more you include, the greater your chances for being awarded the grant.
- 4) Calculate a time line for the project, specific tasks to be accomplished as well as the total cost of the project. You will be asked to itemize and submit these plans.
- 5) Decide how you want to meet your neighborhood's portion of the contribution. The sources of your neighborhood contribution must be well documented when you submit your application.
- 6) Do you want to use neighborhood labor? The neighborhood needs to document this in the application.
- 7) Designate one person in your group who is willing to be the "project coordinator". They need to be willing to represent your group in an official contract with the Town.
- 8) Fill out the attached application and return it to the Neighborhood Enhancement Office.
- 9) The deadline to accept the grant applications is the end of each month.

How are applications evaluated?

A subcommittee of the Planning Commission will evaluate the applications and make the recommendation to Town Council as to which applications will be awarded a grant match and the extent of the match. This year there is \$20,000 available for the Town match. The applications will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- ✓ How the project impacts the neighborhood.
- ✓ The level of involvement from residents on the project.
- ✓ The level of neighbor participation and commitment to the project.
- ✓ How the project addresses neighborhood and Comprehensive Plan goals.

- ✓ The location of the project and its accessibility to the public.
- ✓ Does the project require the creation of a public access easement.
- ✓ How the project promotes community within the neighborhood.
- ✓ What the benefit of the project is for the neighborhood.
- ✓ The neighborhood match is well documented.
- ✓ Designation of a project coordinator that is responsible for the project.
- ✓ Evidence that local businesses are involved or were solicited for involvement in the process.
- ✓ Explanation of how the project will be overseen and evaluated.
- ✓ A projected timeline indicating that it can be accomplished within one (1) year.
- ✓ Document stating the maintenance requirements for the project after completion and who will maintain it.

Neighborhoods may submit more than one application, however the neighborhood residents must rank the priority of each of their grant applications. The Planning Commission Subcommittee will evaluate the applications after October 31, 2002 and applicants will be notified of the Subcommittee's decision as soon as possible.

Grant application evaluations will be conducted in several rounds until the Town matching funds for the neighborhood grant has been expended or all valid applications have been reviewed. The Subcommittee will first evaluate the grant applications that are to be located on Public Property and received the highest priority from each neighborhood then determine their consistency with the evaluation criteria stated above, including the projects compatibility with Blacksburg Comprehensive Plan and Town Codes. The Committee will then recommend the funding level for each eligible grant. If Town matching funds remain after the first round the Committee will proceed to evaluate grant applications that were ranked the second priority by the neighborhoods. This process will continue until all grant applications have been reviewed and their eligibility and funding recommendations have been determined. The Subcommittee will then provide a recommendation to Town Council as to which grant applications should receive a town match and the funding level for each grant application. Town Council will make the final determination for the Town matching funds allocated to the neighborhood grant projects.

How will the Grant be administered?

Once the application has been approved, the Town will create an account for each grant and the neighborhood match and Town match will be deposited into this account. The neighborhood project coordinator will submit bills to the finance department and have the bills paid from the neighborhood grant account. If the project has not begun within 6 months of the grant being awarded, or if the application committee has any reason to think that the money is being used for something other than the project, the Town will require the coordinator to return all the grant money within 30 days of notification. The grant recipients will be asked to submit informal evaluations at least once during the implementation of their project. Within 30 days of a project completion an evaluation form available from the Neighborhood Enhancement Office needs to be filled out and returned.

PLEASE SUBMIT ANY QUESTIONS AND GRANT APPLICATIONS TO:

Neighborhood Enhancement Program

300 South Main Street
P.O. Box 90003
Blacksburg, VA 24062-9003

961-1126